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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4457
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0822
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9598
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4116
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1576
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3293
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6693
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4307
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0705
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0706
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0349
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2639
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0281
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000530

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: NLD: REGIME NEEDS LEGITIMACY TO ADDRESS WOES

REF: RANGOON 505

RANGOON 00000530 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: P/E Chief W. Patrick Murphy for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary: In a departure from previous party policies, the NLD issued a statement on April 21 that emphasized Burma's urgent need for humanitarian assistance and underscored that the ruling military regime requires legitimacy in order to deal immediately with the "calamities and pandemics suffered by the people." Party leaders told us on April 25 that, while their overall objective remains a meaningful political dialogue with the SPDC, their message on the urgent need for international aid reflects deteriorating conditions. The party's compelling offer to forgo its own legitimate right to govern, and instead recognize the SPDC as legitimate, at least temporarily, offers the best opportunity in years for a meaningful dialogue and national reconciliation. End Summary.

12. (SBU) As previewed by party leaders (reftel), the National League for Democracy issued a special statement on April 21 reiterating its February appeal to the Burmese military regime to form a People's Parliament, based on the 1990 legislative election results. The new Parliament would in turn proclaim the ruling State Peace and Development Council as a transitional "legitimate ruling council."

13. (U) As it did on February 12, the NLD underscored the need for immediate dialogue. The party urged the SPDC to discuss with the NLD "practical issues for the benefit of the people." As a follow-on step, the NLD suggested that discussions should broaden to include representatives of the ethnic nationalities. "There (is much) evidence both in internal and international affairs that prove that no problem could be settled constructively for the country and the people without dialogue," said the statement. The NLD urged a response from the SPDC by May 27, the 16th anniversary of

the 1990 election.

¶4. (U) In a significant departure from the NLD's standard platform that the first objective of a political dialogue should be a transition to democracy, the April 21 statement emphasized that the SPDC requires legitimacy in order to deal immediately with the "calamities and pandemics suffered by the people." The NLD cited a list of current woes and social problems that Burma must contend with, including: poverty, inflation, transportation and energy deficiencies; environmental degradation; illicit drug production and trafficking; the spread of infectious diseases; and trafficking in persons.

¶5. (SBU) The party also modified its position on humanitarian assistance, distancing itself from previous views that many forms of international aid can have the unintended result of bolstering the regime's staying power. The NLD statement said: "Because of the insufficiency of financial resources in the country to solve the above problems, the situation is reached whereby the humanitarian assistance from the international organizations, including the United Nations, is urgently required. Plans should be made such that the humanitarian assistance reaches the affected persons. This will mean that compassion is shown towards those people."

¶6. (C) We met on April 25 with NLD Chairman U Aung Shwe and Spokesman U Lwin. The two party leaders acknowledged that their emphasis on humanitarian assistance was a "slight" modification in party policy, but emphasized that their political strategy had not changed, but rather reflected deteriorating conditions. "I'm 82 years old and U Aung Shwe is almost 88," said U Lwin, "we've never seen social conditions as bad as they are now." U Aung Shwe noted that the SPDC generals, as leaders of the country, had a

RANGOON 00000530 002.2 OF 002

responsibility to address Burma's problems, but could only do so if they were recognized as legitimate. He added that Aung San Suu Kyi had long supported international assistance, as long as it is "transparent, closely monitored, and gets to the people most in need."

¶7. (C) U Aung Shwe said that he had written a personal letter on April 24 to SPDC Chairman Than Shwe, delivering the NLD statement. He had no expectation that Than Shwe would reply, but opined that the Senior General "should show me some respect and at least acknowledge that he received the correspondence." U Aung Shwe briefly served as Than Shwe's commanding officer in 1955 when he, the NLD Chairman, was a then-colonel in the Burmese Army.

¶8. (C) Comment: The NLD--highly restricted by the regime's intense harassment, intimidation, and efforts to dismantle the party's national network--has a weak negotiating position. We doubt that the SPDC will respond in any meaningful manner to the revamped proposal. Nonetheless, the NLD remains at the fore of the democratic opposition movement. Not only should we support the thoughtful proposal, but we should raise it with ASEAN and other countries in the region who have long criticized Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD as stubborn and inflexible. The party's willingness to recognize the SPDC as legitimate offers the best opportunity in years for a meaningful dialogue and national reconciliation. It would also bring all of the parties together to address the social ills creating Burma's humanitarian crisis. End Comment.

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